



An Excellent Innovation ¹

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The meaning of the words of `Umar ؓ, “An excellent innovation”

On page 110, you mentioned regarding the words of `Umar ؓ, “An excellent innovation,” that the scholars who are considered all agreed that it refers to a linguistic innovation, i.e. something new.

We want to know the source of this consensus because the commentators of Hadīth, including al-Qastallānī and Ibn Hajar in their commentary on the Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, who are those who are trusted in Hadīth, agree that it is not a linguistic innovation, as you claim. You must look at the text of the Hadīth of al-Bukhārī from `Abdul Rahmān ibn `Abdul Qārī. He said,

One night in Ramadān I went out with “Umar ibn al-Khattāb to the mosque and the people were separated in different groups. One man was praying on his own and another man with a group behind him following his prayer. `Umar said, “I think that it would be better for all these people to join together behind one reciter.” So he decided to gather them behind Ubayy ibn Ka'b. Then another night I went out with him again and all the people were praying behind one reciter. `Umar said, “This is an excellent innovation! But the one they sleep through is better than the one they are praying,” meaning prayer in the last part of the night. People used to stand in prayer during the first part of the night.

This is the text of the Hadīth of al-Bukhārī, and you can consult the text of al-Qastallānī, vol. 3, p. 426 with commentary on this Hadīth. `Umar called it *bid`ah* (innovation):

1. Because the Prophet ﷺ had not made it their custom to gather together for it.
2. Nor was it the custom in the time of Abū Bakr ؓ.
3. It was not done in the first part of the night.
4. Nor was it done every night.
5. Nor was this number of rak'āt done.

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Innovation can be either mandatory, recommended, permissible, disliked, or forbidden. The Hadīth, **“Every innovation is misguidance”** is a general one which is subject to specification. `Umar ؓ judged this innovation desirable with his words, “This is an excellent innovation.” *Ni`uma* is a word which includes all that is good as *bi`isa* includes all that is evil.

Then al-Qastallānī said,

The number of *rak`at* which were prayed is not mentioned in this Hadīth. It is known and it is the view of the majority that it was 20 *rak`at* with 10 *taslims*, and that is five rests, each rest consisting of four *rak`at* with two *taslims*, not counting the *shaf`* and *witr*, which are three. Mālik related that in the *Muwatta`*: “The people used to pray twenty-three *rak`ats* at night during Ramadan in the time of `Umar ibn al-Khattāb.” Then he said, “Mālik preferred to pray 36 *rak`at*, not counting the *witr*, and said, “That is the practice in Medina .” He said, “It was 23 *rak`at*, and then was made 39 with the *shaf`* and *witr*.”

In the book of Ibn Abī Shaybā, he is reported as saying, “I found people in Madīna in the time of `Umar ibn `Abdul Azīz and Abān ibn `Uthmān praying 36 *rak`ats* and doing the *witr* with three.” This is the action of the people of Medina because they wanted to be equal to the people of Mecca who did tawaf as seven between every two of the *tarawih*. The people of Medina put four *rak`at* in place of every seven. Al-Shāfi`ī said in what al-Za`frānī transmitted, “I saw people praying 37 in Medina and 23 in Mecca.” There is no specific limit in any of that. The Hanbalīs say, “*Tarawih* is 20, and there is nothing wrong in doing more as Imam Ahmad stated.”

Ibn Hajar mentioned in *al-Fath*, vol. 4, p. 353, Dar al-Fikr, when he quotes this Hadīth under no. 2010,

The root meaning of *bid`ah* is that which occurs without prior example. In the Sharī`ah it is opposite the Sunnah and so it is blameworthy. The truth is that if it is part of what is thought good in the Sharī`ah, it is considered good, and if it is part of that which is thought ugly in the Sharī`ah, it is considered ugly. Otherwise, its category is permissible (*mubah*). It is divided into five rulings.

Al-Qastallānī said on the same subject, “Others believe that the prayer alone at home is better since the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ persisted in that and he ﷺ died while matters were like that and that continued until well into `Umar’s Caliphate.” `Umar admitted that it was preferred, as was stated. Imam Mālik, Abū Yūsuf and some Shāfi`īs say that.

You can see by these texts that by *bid`ah*, `Umar meant legal, not linguistic *bid`ah*, and that some scholars originated an increase in the numbers of *rak`at*, like Imam Mālik who knew that the Messenger ﷺ had not prayed 39 *rak`at*. That is confirmation that what is meant by the words of `Umar, “an excellent innovation” is a legal, not linguistic innovation. We are discussing a legal ruling as `Umar spoke of a legal ruling connected to *tarawih*. If the *tarawih* prayer which continues in Ramadan is not a legal innovation, why do scholars disagree about it and there are differing views about its number and the manner of its performance? If it had been a firm Sunnah which the Messenger did, scholars and Imams would not have disagreed about it and its number.

Al-Zurqānī said in the commentary of the *Muwatta'*, vol. 1, p. 214, about the words of `Umar, "An excellent innovation,"

Ibn `Umar said about the *dubā* prayer, 'An excellent innovation.' Allāh Almighty said, ***'They invented monasticism – We did not prescribe it for them – purely out of desire for the pleasure of Allāh.'*** (57:27) This is a clear statement from `Umar that he was the first to gather people together to pray behind one Imām in Ramadān because the innovation is what the innovator begins which no one has done before him. So `Umar innovated it and the Companions and people follow that, etc. This explains the soundness of giving a verdict by opinion and *ijtihad*, and it is called innovation because the Prophet ﷺ did not make it a Sunnah to gather for it nor did that exist in the time of Abū Bakr. Linguistically it means what is originated without prior model, and legally it is the opposite of Sunna. It is what did not exist in the time of the Prophet ﷺ. Then innovation is divided into five rulings. The Hadīth ***'Every innovation is misguidance'*** is general and then made specific. When the Companions agreed to that with `Umar, then the name innovation is removed from it.

Imam al-Ubbī mentioned the following Hadīth in the Sahīh Muslim, vol. 3, p. 152, ***"Anyone who creates a good sunnah in Islam has its reward and the reward of whoever does it after him until the Day of Rising"*** with the following *isnād*: Muhammad ibn Muthannā al-`Anāzī related from Muhammad ibn Ja`far from Shu`ba from `Awn ibn Abī Juhayfā from al-Mundhir ibn Jarīr from his father who said,

Once we were with the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ at the beginning of the day when some people came, barefoot, unclothed, wearing striped garments or cloaks, girded with swords. Most of them were from Mudar. The face of Messenger of Allāh ﷺ showed his concern at what he saw of their extreme need. He went inside and then came out and commanded Bilāl to give the *adhān* and the *iqāma*. He prayed and then spoke and said, ***"O mankind! Be fearful of your Lord who created you from a single self..."*** (4:1) and the *ayāt* in *al-Hashr*, ***"Be fearful of Allāh! Let each self look to what it has forwarded for Tomorrow."*** (59:18) "Let a man give from his *dinārs*, from his clothes, from the *sa'* of his wheat, from the *sa'* of his dates, even, " he said, "a half of a date." A man of the Ansār brought a bag which he could barely get his arms round, indeed, he could not do so. Then the people came one after another until I saw two heaps of food and clothes and I saw the face of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ shining as if it was illuminated. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, "Anyone who creates a good *sunnah* in Islam has its reward and the reward of whoever does it after him without that decreasing his reward in any way. Anyone who creates a bad *sunnah* in Islam bears its burden and the burden of whoever acts by it after him without that decreasing his burden in any way."

Its commentator said,

It contains encouragement to initiate what is good. This Hadīth narrows down the meaning of the general Hadīth: ***'Every new thing is innovation'***. What is meant by new things are those which are innovations, new false things." Included in the Hadīth, ***'Anyone who creates a good sunna'*** are recommended innovations, like preparation with equipment, a morning meal, and writing books.

We see that the scholars innovated that. Shaykh al-Mālikī included celebration of the Mawlid of the Prophet ﷺ as one of the recommended innovations.

Omission does not indicate prohibition

The conclusions of the author of the *Himār* about *bid'ah* and prohibition are usually phrased, “The Messenger ﷺ did not do that,” “It is not established that the Messenger ﷺ did that,” and “The Messenger ﷺ did not celebrate the Mawlid”, and he deduces prohibition from the fact that the Messenger did not do that. We ask, “Does omission indicated prohibition?”

The noble Hadīth scholar, Abūl Fadl `Abdullāh Muhammad ibn al-Siddīq al-Ghumārī wrote in a book called, *Excellent Understanding and Perception of the Question of Omission*:

Omission means that the Prophet ﷺ omitted something and did not do it, or that the Salaf omitted it without there being a Hadīth or tradition about the prohibition of that omitted thing which would demand that it is prohibited or disliked. Many later people use that as proof of the prohibition or censure of things, and some obstinate individuals go to excess in that.

When the Messenger ﷺ omitted something, that can imply things other than prohibition. He may have omitted it by his custom, as he did not eat lizards. He may have omitted it by forgetting it, like forgetfulness in the prayer. He may have omitted it out of the fear of imposing something on his community, like not doing the *tarawih* prayer. He may have omitted it by not thinking of it. So the Messenger ﷺ spoke on a palm trunk and did not think about using a chair until the Companions suggested that a *minbar* be made and then he did that. Or he ﷺ may have omitted it out of fear of having a negative effect on the hearts of the Companions or some of them, as he ﷺ said to `A'isha, “Were it not that your people were recently unbelievers, I would have demolished the House and then rebuilt it on the foundations of Ibrāhīm ؑ” as we find in the two *Sahih* Collections.

So omission alone, if not accompanied by a text that what was omitted is forbidden, does not constitute proof. This verdict is not derived from the mere fact of omission on its own. It is derived from evidence which indicates that.

Abū Sa`īd ibn Lubb said,

Those who dislike supplication at the end of the prayer rely on the fact that the supplication at the end of the prayer is not found in the Sunnah, necessitating the interpretation: since it was not part of the action of the Salaf. Based on the assumption of the soundness of this transmission, omission does not oblige a ruling about what is omitted other than the fact that it is permitted to omit it and there is no interdiction in it. As for connecting prohibition or dislike to the omission, that is not the case, especially when it has a basis in the Sharī`ah, as supplication does.

In *al-Muhallā* pt. 2, p. 254, Ibn Hazm mentioned the evidence of the Mālikis and Hanafīs for it being disliked to pray two *rak'at* before Maghrib along with the verdict of Ibrāhīm al-Nakhā'ī since Abū Bakr ؓ, `Umar ؓ and `Uthman ؓ did not pray it. He replied to them: “If it were sound, there still would be no proof in it because it does not say that they were forbidden that.”

Evidence that omission does not indicate prohibition

Part of the evidence is what Ibn al-Siddiq al-Ghumārī says about omission not entailing prohibition.

1. Allāh Almighty, ***“Whatever the Messenger gives you, you should accept and whatever He forbids you, you should forgo.”*** (59:7) He did not say, “Leave what he left.”
2. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, ***“When I command you to do something, then do it as much as you can. When I forbid you to do something, then leave off doing it.”*** He did not say, “Avoid what I omit.” How then does omission indicate prohibition?
3. The *Usūlis* define the Sunnah as the words of the Prophet ﷺ his actions and his affirmation. They did not include his omission because it is not evidence.
4. Omission can have categories other than prohibition. The rule in the *usūl* is that something which is theoretical is not used for conclusion. We do not say that what the Messenger ﷺ did not do, like celebrating the Mawlid, is *haram* because that is forging against Allāh ﷻ since omission does not necessitate prohibition. Al-Shāfī said, “All that has a source in the Sharī`ah is not innovation, even if the Salaf did not do it.” So if someone forbids celebrating the Mawlid of the Prophet with the claim that is innovation, we argue with him with what we said, followed by the words, of Allāh ﷻ, ***“Say: ‘Has Allāh given you authority to do this or are you inventing lies against Allāh?’”*** (10:59)

*Omission is not a proof in our Sharī`ah.
It does not demand prohibition or make mandatory.
Whoever desires prohibition by the omission
of our Prophet and sees it as true judgment and correct
Has been misguided from the path of all proofs.
He errs in the sound ruling and fails.*

